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ACTING DIRECTOR KERR ADDRESSES OSS VETERANS AT CIA

McLean, VA, 7 Sep -- The challenges facing US intelligence have increased in scope and complexity despite recent internal developments in the Soviet Union, according to Acting Director of Central Intelligence Richard J. Kerr.

Speaking to a group of Office of Strategic Services (OSS) veterans this morning at the CIA's Headquarters Building, Mr. Kerr said: "The challenges ahead of us in a world of instability, in a world of real confusion and realignment, are much greater in many ways than the challenges that were facing us when we had a single, rather straightforward enemy to look at."

He added that the demands of intelligence require "more information and more specific kinds of information" as well as "more complicated and sophisticated analysis" on issues such as weapons proliferation, regional instability, ethnic strife, narcotics, and terrorism, among others.

"It is a much more complicated world, and intelligence has a very real role to play," he said.

Mr. Kerr told the 100 veterans of the OSS' Operational Group Command, who have been in town this week for a reunion, that the CIA is an organization "that retains, in my judgment, a very strong determination to be as objective, independent, and as forceful as it can be not only in collecting information, but in taking the results of that information and turning it into a product that makes a difference -- a product that people have to listen to, a product

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that has credibility, and a product that is intellectually sound...That is not an easy thing to do in this world."

He added that the work of intelligence is key to the "fundamental policy process."

"The reason we are important (to that process) is because we have an objectivity, an independence, and a professionalism that has carried us through the years," he said.

"Fortunately, we have a group of consumers today who understand how important having that voice of independence is," he added.

Mr. Kerr acknowledged that the Agency is currently "under a fair amount of fire."

"My view is that's not unique," he told the OSS veterans, who were known within the OSS as the "OGs" and were specially recruited and trained for missions deep inside enemy-held territory during World War II. "It has been under fire since your days, and it is at risk all the time. And one of the reasons why I believe it is at risk is because it is willing to step out and take chances...It is willing to put its own people in jeopardy -- physical and intellectual jeopardy, and other kinds of jeopardy. It is a courageous organization today as it was earlier."

Emphasizing that the CIA is an organization that is "sound in its understanding of its objectives and its purpose," he added: "We are always walking a rather thin line between success and failure because we are involved in taking risks. And it (the organization) is going to remain that way if it's going to be effective."

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Despite criticisms of intelligence and recent allegations reported in the press, Mr. Kerr added: "I am struck more than anything else by how resilient this organization is, and how willing it is to go on with its work."

"CIA is a very vibrant organization -- an organization that has a great deal of commitment and an enthusiasm and quality of people that is just outstanding," he said.

"Our people who serve overseas and their families are willing to live in what can sometimes be horrible conditions, and they are willing to do it because of their enthusiasm for the mission of the organization," he said. "We have people who work long hours, day after day, and they work weekends. They do it because they are excited about the business."

Mr. Kerr also told the OSS group that in the foyer of the CIA Headquarters Building are memorial stars for CIA employees who gave their lives in the service of their country, and he fully intends to look into establishing a suitable memorial for OSS members who died serving their country during World War II.